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Office of University
Communications

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Three Former GWU Students Now Teach ASL at Blue Ridge Community College

By Mallory Moore, '18, Intern for Communications



Rose Fichera-Lening (right), a 2002 GWU Alumna, teaches ASL at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, N.C.

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—Celebrating its 40th anniversary, the American Sign Language (ASL) program at Gardner-Webb University gives students the opportunity to learn and practice this language, develop useful communication and cultural skills, and prepare for careers as interpreters. The University began a program for Deaf students and offered the first sign language classes in the fall of 1977. Many alumni work in education, including three graduates who serve as teachers at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, N.C., in the two-year interpreter training program. As ASL instructors, Rose Fichera-Lening, Kimberly Hendrix, and Kyle Kiser play vital roles in getting their students on the right track for their career goals, providing them with a solid foundation of ASL and interpreting skills.

Rose Fichera-Lening began teaching at Blue Ridge in January and teaches online, hybrid, and face-to-face interpreting classes. As an instructor, she prepares her students for real-world interpreting and encourages them to continue their education by pursuing bachelor's degrees. She graduated from GWU in 2002 as an ASL major and an interpreting minor. The University's ASL program, under the direction of associate professor Dr. Mary High, sets high standards for its interpreting students, which prepared Fichera-Lening for her interpreting and teaching career. "I enjoyed my time as a student at Gardner-Webb, especially traveling to Deaf and interpreting events with friends," she stated. "I married a GWU graduate and made lifelong friends with classmates and the instructional staff. I still call Dr. High for her advice and I have kept in touch with other faculty/staff as well."

Kimberly Hendrix also joined the team at Blue Ridge in January of this year and teaches ASL courses. She is no stranger to teaching, however, as she taught at Cleveland Community College in Shelby, N.C. for 22 years prior to her current teaching position. She even taught part-time while enrolled at Gardner-Webb. Hendrix graduated in 2006 with a bachelor's degree in ASL and went on to earn her master's from Lamar University in

Beaumont, Texas, in Bicultural/Bilingual Education and Teaching ASL. Hendrix believes that her Gardner-Webb professors made her a stronger teacher, particularly former professor Dr. Keith Cagle. “BRCC is growing in numbers and is becoming a great program,” Hendrix said. “I am proud to be an employee there. I will always credit GWU for the first steps towards my educational career as a teacher.”

Kimberly Hendrix graduated from GWU in 2006 and is one of three alumni who teach American Sign Language at Blue Ridge Community College in Flat Rock, N.C.

Kyle Kiser graduated from Gardner-Webb in 2006 as an ASL Major and began working at Blue Ridge in August 2016. He is the program’s Lead Interpreting/ASL Instructor and teaches a variety of classes including Deaf Globe Studies, Linguistics, and ASL language classes. Kiser also opened his own interpreting agency, Clarity Language Access LLC, which operates in Shelby. The ASL instructors at GWU helped Kiser to build a strong network with local organizations that has greatly helped him with his career. “What I loved most about GWU,” Kiser shared, “was meeting and making more Deaf/hard of hearing friends. We shared a lot of the same growing up experiences, backgrounds, education, religion, struggles, etc. I also loved all of my professors and the Noel Center for Disability Resources’ staff/faculty because they all showed their care for our success and ensured all of our accommodation needs were met.”

Kyle Kiser is a 2006 alumnus of Gardner-Webb.

These three alumni look forward to a future collaboration between the ASL programs at their alma mater and Blue Ridge. As ASL instructors, Fichera-Lening, Hendrix, and Kiser prepare students for careers as qualified, professional ASL/English interpreters. The skills and professional connections they acquired as undergraduates still help them today.

Located in the North Carolina foothills, Gardner-Webb University is a private, Christian, liberal arts university that prepares students to become critical thinkers, effective leaders and compassionate servants in the global community. Emphasizing a strong student-centered experience and rigorous academics, Gardner-Webb ignites learning and service opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students. Ignite your future at Gardner-Webb.edu.